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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ML](#)
SUBJECT: BANDITRY OR REBELLION: TUAREGS AND MALIAN MILITARY
CLASH AT TIN-ZAWATENE

REF: BAMAKO 0505

Classified By: POLITICAL OFFICER GLENN FEDZER
FOR REASON 1.4(B) and (D)

¶1. (SBU) The confrontation between Ibrahim Bahanga and the Malian army (reftel) in Tin-zawatene turned violent 11 May when Bahanga allegedly launched an early morning attack; embassy sources indicated that three Malian soldiers were killed and two wounded. Bahanga's casualties were not reported, but local press reports put fatalities for both sides as high as 20. No official announcement has been made by the Malian military. The Minister of Territorial Administration Kone told the Ambassador May 11 that the Malian authorities would "quickly master the situation."

¶2. (U) Other Tuaregs, most significantly ADC (Alliance Democratique du Mai 23 pour le Changement) leader Iyad Aghaly, have distanced themselves from Bahanga's actions. An Embassy source indicated that ADC members were actively engaging local Tuareg communities to impress upon them that Bahanga was acting alone, and had attached ADC members to Malian military units to make the same point.

¶3. (C) As one newspaper put it, Bahanga's actions appear more banditry than rebellion. Bahanga does not appear to have general support of the Tuareg population, and his actions may in fact endanger the very development projects he claims to demand. More likely his attack was an attempt to coordinate some control over the smuggling trade (reftel) in the region--and likely a failed attempt. Embassy sources reported that despite their casualties, the Malian Army held their ground, and received reinforcements from Kidal, even including some ADC members, within hours of the first attack. By the end of the day, Bahanga withdrew (one source put him across the border in Algeria), leaving the Malian Army in control of Tin-zawatene.
McCulley